

Excelsior Grounds Committee Meeting Minutes: Approved 8/16/2024

Location: 6263 Midnight Pass Road Sarasota, FL 34242 Community Room
Date: 8/12/2024
Time: Called to order: 11:00 AM Adjourned: 1:00 PM
Next Meeting: TBD

Attendance

Bruce Ketcham, Chair

Committee Members Present: Lynne Brown, Denise Baum, Patricia Ketcham, Jim London, Judy Wittmus

Guests: Patricia Bjelland, Beverly Murphy, Glen Paine, John Wittmus

Patricia Ketcham volunteered to take minutes for this meeting

Purpose of Meeting

1. Old Business
 - a. Review of status of projects discussed at the last meeting.
2. New Business
 - a. Review of progress on Action Items identified in last meeting
 - b. Discussion of future planning for Grounds projects with committee input.

Old Business

1. Minutes

Approved minutes from March 28, 2024 meeting were posted on Excelsior website on April 2nd. Notice of today's committee meeting was sent to Dan and posted on the building lobby bulletin boards on August 8th.

2. Pond Management

Three pond management contractors were requested to provide proposals for treatment of the water in the three lagoons. Two of the three responded. The proposal submitted by Lake Doctors was accepted in late April. The first monthly treatment began in May. The appearance of the lagoons has significantly improved. Work is continuing to reduce algae and weeds from ponds.

3. Bee's Nest

The bee's nest uncovered by SavATree in a hollow of the Oak tree by the bayside bridge was removed by a bee keeper in May. The number of bees found in the bayside pool water has been reduced significantly.

4. Benches

Two new benches were delivered and placed on the east side of building 1 overlooking the north and south lagoons. The committee would like to see the additional 2 benches that were previously requested purchased in the coming months and placed on the east side of the atrium.

5. Beach Chair Shortage

Fifteen additional beach chairs were delivered in late April. Discussion with Dan indicated that he wanted to maintain 100 lounge chairs and 25 table chairs on the beach. To meet those numbers, five additional lounge chairs and 7 additional table chairs were ordered in June and are scheduled to be delivered in late August.

Action Items from March 28, 2024 Meeting

1. Sod Replacement

Following concerns and complaints from owners related to the condition of sod, an email (copy attached) was sent to the Association Board members on March 30th expressing the committee's request for additional funding for sod installation and any required revision to the irrigation system to maintain the sod.

2. Follow-Up on Bayside Well Improvements

A written proposal received from Ron Weaver at Thompson Well Drilling to replace the bayside VFD and move its power source from the building 1 electric room to the Maintenance Building was sent to Terry Jones on April 12th. Bruce explained the rationale for this move and cited that Terry Jones, Dan Watnem, and Jim London were present at the initial meeting with Ron. Terry advised that no action would be taken in 2024 and that the proposal should be submitted for consideration as a request in the 2025 budget.

3. Plant Replacement

The proposals from Tropical Gardens and Florida Irrigation Contractors for replacement of plants and associated irrigation revisions around buildings 4, 5 and the bayside pool were received and approved by Dan. The work was completed on May 10th.

New Business

1. June 27th Board Meeting

a. Approval of Mulch Contract

The quote for mulch installation received from RAMCO was reviewed with the Board. The quoted price was \$15.6K, same as last year. Contract was approved by the Board. Mulch installation is currently scheduled for September 16th and 17th.

b. Approval of Tropical Gardens Contract

Tropical Garden's quote for removal of wood chips and 4x4 timbers from the tree well at the southeast corner of building 1, filling the tree well with soil, and resodding of the area was reviewed with the Board. Quoted price was \$7070. Board discussion focused on whether the maintenance staff could remove the wood chips to reduce the expenditure.

Following the discussion, the Board decided to proceed with the approval of the contract with Tropical Gardens.

c. Request for Funding for Sod Replacement

Bruce presented the Committee's request for additional funding for replacement of sod that was damaged during the 2023 drought and delay in replacing the bayside well pump. The Board requested that Bruce proceed with obtaining additional quotes.

2. Plant Replacement

Tropical Gardens removed the wood chips and 4x4 timbers from the tree well at the southeast corner of building 1, filled the tree well with soil, resodded the area and completed the planned planting around the bayside pool on August 1st and 2nd. Florida Irrigation Contractors completed the necessary irrigation revisions. Committee members commented on the improved appearance of the area.

3. Damage Caused by Tropical Storm Debby

The property sustained flooding and tree damage on the gulf side as well as displacement of beach chairs on the beach and pool furniture being tipped on their sides. The bayside had extensive palm fronds, tree branches, and plant debris across all areas. A volunteer group conducted a bayside cleanup while staff concentrated on the gulf side. Tropical Gardens provided maintenance, mowing and removed all piles of debris. The property was returned to pre-storm condition within 3 days after the storm. The committee discussed if there is a protocol for storm preparation and questioned why chairs were left on beach and umbrellas left up. The concerns will be shared with Dan Watnem.

4. Special Assessment proposed by Excelsior Condominium Board.

As requested by the Board at the June 27th Board meeting, Bruce submitted a proposal for sod replacement and irrigation revisions by email (copy attached) to all Board members on July 24th. The email outlined the proposal process that included development of protocol and requests sent to multiple landscaping companies to quote the project with follow up with each vendor. Ultimately, only Tropical Gardens provided a quote. The others provided rationale for why they were unable to do the work. Bruce shared that one company noted that Tropical Gardens is the maintenance service for Excelsior, therefore knows the property and is the best company to complete the restoration and provide services needed to maintain it. The committee supported that opinion.

The board then took action to propose a special assessment of \$527 per unit for sod replacement and irrigation installation to be presented at a meeting on August 21, 2024. Notice of the assessment with attached quotes was sent to owners by Dan on August 6th. The landscaping special assessment was separated from additional special assessment amounts for fob repair and deficits in the budget. Extensive committee discussion ensued about the division of the assessment and how the board might proceed within the framework of the condominium bylaws. Bruce outlined a revised timeline for the work if the sod replacement was approved at the August 21 meeting.

5. 2025 Budget Items

Bruce asked the committee for input for the 2025 budget. The committee agreed that a realistic budget must be developed and supported by the board. The committee agreed that past boards have under budgeted Grounds items. Bruce developed a “core” grounds budget and will add items for improvement suggested by committee and community members. This will be submitted to the board by late August.

Action Items

1. Complete 2025 Budget recommendations, review with committee, and submit to board.
2. Follow up with Dan regarding storm preparation protocol.

Information on Budget

1. Tree Trimming - Current Budget \$35K

With SavATree completing the planned tree trimming work, approximately \$44K will be spent this year. Minor trimming of the Mangroves and Sea Grapes originally planned for May was not needed and the work was canceled. The currently planned work will exceed the \$35K budget by approximately \$9 K.

2. Flowers / Plants / Mulch - Current budget \$40K

Completed plant replacement has cost approximately \$24.1K. \$15.6K will be spent for mulch installation in September. It is expected that the remaining \$.3K of the \$40K budget will be spent on minor plants.

3. Irrigation - Current Budget \$15K

Completed irrigation repairs include approximately \$4.9K in monthly inspection repairs, \$4.1K for repair of a mainline break, valve replacement and repairs outside of the monthly inspection, and \$7K in revisions prior to installing new plants and sod. Costs to date total approximately \$16K against the budget of \$15K. While it is not possible to fully project future repair costs, irrigation repairs for the year will exceed the budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Ketcham

Dear Board Members:

Per numerous requests from owners and unanimous decision by committee members, the Grounds Committee is requesting additional funding for sod installation and any required revision to irrigation to maintain the sod be included as an agenda item for the next scheduled board meeting.

As stated in the February 1st Grounds Committee Report to the Board:

A landscape plan for 2024 is being developed with Tropical Gardens, our landscape contractor. In January, members of the committee walked the Bayside property with the General Manager of Tropical Gardens. The current plan is to restore the damaged Bayside plants followed by the restoration of the damaged Bayside grass areas.

- The landscape plant/grass/mulch budget is \$40K.
- \$15K (now \$17K) has been reserved for installation of mulch in November (to retain moisture, suppress weed growth, and moderate temperature extremes).
- Approximately \$4100 (as of February 1st) has been spent to date in 2024.
- Restoration of the plants is planned to be completed over time in \$5K increments to spread the budgeted amount over the year.
- Restoration of the grass areas will follow.
- However, the budget, unless increased by the board, will limit/prohibit the grass areas that can be restored this year.

Significant Discussion at March 29th Grounds Committee Meeting:

In the March 28th Grounds Committee meeting, all committee members unanimously agreed that grass replacement for all damaged areas was a priority. All members have received input and requests from owners about the condition of the grass across the property over the past 3 months. Current budget constraints are a prohibitive factor. Committee members agreed that this request for additional funding be made to the Association Board. An estimate was received from our current contractor, Tropical Gardens, for replacement of the grass areas damaged by last summer's irrigation outage and drought on February 20th. They estimated that approximately 22K square feet of grass needed to be replaced at a cost of approximately \$54K (plus any necessary irrigation revisions). This information has previously been provided to Terry, Janet, and Dan. Once the Board approves additional funds for sod replacement and any required irrigation revisions, I will request additional proposals for comparison and consideration for sod installation. Seeking proposals from vendors prior to funding being approved leads to outdated cost estimates and reluctance by vendors to provide quotes in the future.

Bruce Ketcham

Grounds Committee Chairman

Dear Board Members:

As requested at the last Board meeting, I have taken the following actions to obtain proposals for the restoration of sod on the property that was damaged due to last year's drought and irrigation outage. The motion for restoration was brought to the board by the Grounds Committee following concerns and complaints from owners about the condition of the sod around buildings and common areas.

A total of 35 areas on the property were identified for sod replacement. An additional sloped area, on the southside of the South Villa, was identified for installation of washed shells in lieu of sod.

The property was walked with the General Manager of Tropical Gardens, our landscape contractor, to measure the square footage of those areas, and the owner of Florida Irrigation Contractor, our irrigation contractor, to identify recommended irrigation revisions needed to maintain the sod.

A Request for Proposal (RFP) was prepared that outlined the project requirements (copy attached).

The work was divided into two segments. Most of the sod restoration is planned for late September / early October with the sod restoration around the villas planned for early November after the Mangroves and Sea Grapes have been trimmed.

The RFP was sent to three landscape companies (Siesta Key Landscape, Sunny Grove Landscape, and Hazeltine Nurseries) in addition to Tropical Gardens. All three declined to quote the work. Additional companies were considered but eliminated due to poor recommendations, the fact that they only provide maintenance, or they did not provide services for our area.

Tropical Gardens quoted \$49,801 for the sod restoration and shell installation and Florida Irrigation Contractor quoted \$37,533 for the associated irrigation revisions (copies attached).

To prevent damage to new sod on the property if this project is approved by the Board, the trimming of the palm trees has been moved from September to mid-August and the trimming of the Mangroves and Sea Grapes is planned for mid-October instead of November. This year's installation of mulch is scheduled for mid-September.

Please contact me if you should have any questions.

Bruce Ketcham

Grounds Committee Chairman